

Andrew Jackson to James Monroe, February 13, 1815, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

TO SECRETARY MONROE.¹

¹ This letter is in Reid's handwriting and is so much amended in the writing that it seems to have been a draft. It is Jackson's general report on the New Orleans campaign.

New Orleans, February 13, 1815.

Sir: The enemy having retired to Ship Island in so crippled a condition as to have little to apprehend from a renewal of his attempts, and being somewhat recovered from severe indisposition, occasioned by fatigue and exposure, I avail myself of this first moment of leisure and health to acquaint you with the situation of affairs in this quarter, before and since my arrival, and with the course of conduct I have deemed it expedient to pursue.

On my arrival at Mobile I rece[i]ved various communications from N. Orleans informing me that the utmost disunion of sentiment prevailed among the inhabitants. A considerable portion of the population was believed to be disaffected to the government and eager for an opportunity to place themselves under another. Great fears were particularly entertained lest the free persons of colour should unite themselves to the enemy on his approach, and become the means of stirring up insurrection among the slaves. Whatever might be the foundation of their fears, it seemed very probable that we must either have this part of the population in our own ranks or find it in the ranks of the enemy; and my first efforts were therefore exerted to inspire them with attachment to our cause. For this purpose I prepared an address, adapted as I thought to their feelings and prejudices, had it forwarded to New Orleans, published, read and explained to them. It was soon

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found to have produced a good effect, and that much less was to be feared from the hostility of their designs than from the disaffection and treachery of the Spaniards. Various intercepted letters rendered it certain that from this source serious danger was justly to be apprehended. The Lakes were covered with Spanish colours employed by British agents to devour our country of provisions and furnish supplies to the enemy. To counteract so dangerous a policy I found it necessary to lay an embargo on all provision-vessels in our ports.

The prospect of affairs seeming to require the immediate presence of all the forces I had been authorised to call into the field I invited that brave and meritorious officer, Genl. Coffee to join me, without delay with 2000 volunteer mounted gunmen. The patriotism of the Tennesseans and their attachment to this leader soon led 2000 volunteers to his standard, with whom he lost no time in marching to join me. Subsequent events have shewn the importance of his arrival. The slow movements of the E Tennessee militia as well as of the new recruits from Knoxville were fortunately atoned for, by the rapid marches of genl. Coffee.

Whilst I was waiting his arrival my attention was constantly directed to the means of defending New Orleans. With this view I had ordered Col McRhea to have all the forts, as soon as possible, in a proper condition for resisting the approaches of the enemy which I gave him to understand there was but too much reason to expect in a short time—directed the governor to have his quota of 1000 men in the field and stationed at the most exposed points, and instructed him to hold the balance of the militia in a state of readiness for taking the field on the shortest notice.

Another matter of the utmost consequence, at the same time claimed my attention. A spirit of hostility among a portion of the Creeks was continued to be kept alive by the excitements of the British and the encouragement and succour they received from the Spaniards at Pensacola. Security to our frontiers was not to be expected so long as these causes continued to produce an influence; and it was necessary, therefore, to defeat their

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operation as soon as possible. This was only to be done by driving both the Brittish and Indians from Pensacola; a measure which I accordingly determined upon and effected. With the history of that expedition you have been made acquainted; and you will pardon me for observing Sir that whatever our relations with Spain may be, or however desirous we may be to preserve them, it was expecting a little too much of good nature to suppose that when we were seeking to defend our country against invasion, we should sit quietly down, and see her give aid and comfort to our enemies without attempting to prevent it. Surely Spain, dare not utter complaints! and certainly, if she does, no American who connects a knowledge of her conduct with that of our situation, will have his heart much lacerated by them. If she harboured our enemies because they were superior to her in strength, and forced themselves upon [*sic*] it was a most happy deliverance which we afforded her; and we have a right, if she be sincere in her professions of freindship or hopes to impress us with that belief, to expect her thanks rather than her censure. No violation or outrage was committed upon Spanish property or Spanish rights, she was assured that none would be, our object was open, avowed—not misunderstood or transcended. But our enemies whom she supported while they were preparing the means to invade us were driven from among her, and made to understand that the place which had so long sheltered them would no more be considered or treated as a sanctuary. This may have been an act of rudeness towards our worthy freind and neighbour not warranted by the civilities which govern the intercourse between polished nations nor consonant to the modern American mode of carrying on war. I am but little versed in the etiquette or punctillios of these matters; and I must take the liberty of adding, that whenever I shall be entrusted with the defence of an important section of my country I am quite sure it will not be sacraficed by too strict an attention to them.

Having effected the object for which I had carried the expedition to Pensacola, I immediately took up the line of march for N. Orleans which it was now my purpose to reach as soon as practicable by forced marches. On getting back to the Alabama I was

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greatly disappointed at finding that neither the East Tennessee militia nor the recruits of the 24th and 39th Regiments had yet arrived

It being of great importance, as I conceived, that a sudden and final blow should be made on that portion of the Creeks who continued to keep up hostilities I was compelled to detach, for this purpose one half of genl. Coffee's brigade; who were accordingly placed under the command of Majr. Blue, and ordered on an expedition against them.

Genl. Coffee, with the balance of his forces was ordered to Baton Rouge, there to hold himself in readiness to march on the shortest notice, to whatever point he might be directed. An express was sent to Majr. General Carrol urging him to hasten with the West Tennessee division of militia to New Orleans; to which place, I and my staff, now proceeded by the way of Tchefuncta. On my arrival I was flattered by the greetings of all; and while I returned to all the salute of entire confidence, I must own that I manifested somewhat more than I felt. I lost no time in visiting the different posts and was disappointed and concerned to find them all in a very defenceless condition, except Fort St Phillips, and even to that I found it necessary to order two 32 pounders and a 13½ mortar to be added, and to cause another battery to be established on the opposite bank of the river An additional battery was also ordered to be erected on the left bank of the Mississippi at the English Turn; and fearing that the gunboats might fall into the hands of the enemy and Petit Coquille be carried I gave the earliest and most positive directions to have all the canals and bayous communicating from the lakes obstructed, and ordered strong picquets to be posted on the most dangerous of them.

It was not long before I found that the enemy was on the coast, and that hordes of spies and British emisaries lurked in the city. The most energetic measures therefore became necessary. Martial law was declared, strong guards placed on every avenue of the city, no person permitted to leave it without authority in writing, and all who arrived, required to report themselves immediately. Every man capable of bearing arms being enrolled for duty, I omitted no proper means to secure the confidence of all; and had the happiness

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to believe that I had succeeded not only with the white population, but in an equal degree with the men of colour. In the meantime expresses were dispatched to Generals Carrol and Coffee urging their speedy arrival.

The enemy having now entered lake Bourgne,² the gun boats soon fell; an event which, under every concealment, I imagined I could perceive gave to a certain description of inhabitants here, quite as much joy as grief. The utmost circumspection and the utmost energy became alike necessary. While I endeavoured to give new animation to patriotism by assurances of triumph, I held out to Treason the certainty of punishment. If at last, I succeeded in escaping the effects of the latter I am fearful it was not because it no where existed.

² Borgne.

Genl. Coffee having, received my order, was barely enabled to reach me in time by forced marches of sixty miles a day. His partial force had become greatly reduced by the multiplied hardships and privations it had been compelled to undergo, since it left Mobile. Genl. Carrol, who descended the river, was enabled by equal exertion to reach me just at the moment when his presence had become so necessary. Unfortunately however he was but illy supplied with arms, having only 1600 stand, and those without cartouch boxes. These, thus destitute of their equipments, were immediately distributed among his division and Genl. Coffee's Brigade.

Such was my situation when on the evening of the 23d December I received intelligence of the landing of a large force of the enemy on the left bank of the Mississippi about seven miles below the city. Perfectly convinced of the importance of impressing an invading enemy in the first moment of his approach, with an idea of spirited resistance, I lost no time in making preparations to attack him, that night. I was not ignorant of the inferiority of my force, nor of the hazard of night attacks with inexperienced troops; but the fears to be entertained from these sources were overbalanced by the greater evils to be apprehended

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from delay. It was easy to foresee that if the attack were postponed till the next day, the fate of N. Orleans must depend on the result of a general engagement in which the chances of success would be greatly against us—while by bringing it on at night, the enemy not being able to ascertain our numbers would of course magnify them, and be thrown into perplexity at any rate, if not into consternation. Neither did I consider the risk very great, as I should be able whenever occasion might render it proper, to withdraw my forces without the danger of being pursued.

Governed by these considerations, in conjunction with others, I brought on the engagement about 8 o'clock at night by attacking the lines of the enemy on several points at the same time. The result equalled my expectations. From every point on which we assailed him, he was repulsed; and we should certainly have succeeded in capturing the whole of his advance, and in taking more prisoners than we had men in the action, had not a thick fog which now arose, increased by a very heavy smoke, rendered it unsafe to prosecute our good fortune any farther. Owing [to] this cause, I drew off my forces, just at the time, as it since appears, when the enemy was about to lay down his arms. The main object, however, had been effected. The enemy taken at surprise, and thrown into confusion, was unable to penetrate our designs and feared to prosecute his own. Believing that he should certainly be attacked again the next morning, he fell back, before day to a different piece of ground and waited my approach; thereby giving me time to seize and strengthen a more defensible position. When he discovered his mistake it was too late to rectify it. My own men, believing that the cautious policy which I now observed, proceeded not from any fear of the enemy, but from a determination to leave him no chances of success, continued while acting on the defensive to be governed by the spirit of assailants. To keep up this spirit, as well as to distress the enemy, skirmishing parties were constantly employed in harassing his out posts and in attacking all his assailable points.

Having found, after repeated experiments that it was impossible, by means of his artillery and rockets, to frighten or drive us from our position he, at length, had recourse to the desperate expedient of a storm. This was an attempt which our men had long waited with

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great anxiety to see him make; and therefore met it in the proper spirit. The result you have been made acquainted with. Completely routed and cut to peices, the enemy, from that moment abandoned all hopes of succeeding in his darling project, and directed his whole attention now to the means of effecting his escape with the least loss. Fortunately for him, the situation of the ground, afforded him many advantages for this purpose. Protected on the one side by the river, and on the other by impassable swamps, and intersected in the intervening space by innumerable ditches it was impossible either to cut off his retreat by geting in his rear, or to pursue and fight him on the plain without yeilding to him every advantage of situation. Let it be recollected also, that the arms having not yet arrived, I should have been compelled, notwithstanding his great losses, to fight him with an inferior force.

In the action of the 8th Jan., the whole number of my armed men on the left bank of the Mississippi did not exceed 3200,³ of whom not more than 600 were Regulars—while the force of the enemy which they had to oppose, was nearly three times as great. If his force, after that action was diminished by 3000, as I am perswaded it was, still that which remained, was too great to authorise me, with the means I possessed, to tamper much with it. I was not willing to expose the interests I defended to any risk; yet I must own that it has pained me that a single man of that army escaped. It was so practicable, if any thing like an adequate provission had been made beforehand to have captured the whole of them. Had such a vessel as that which from some strange policy, had been left unfinished on the Chefuncta been completed and on the lake, or had the arms destined for

³ In the Jackson MSS. (Military Papers, V.) are several morning returns of the troops at New Orleans. They are probably only approximately correct, but taking them for what they are worth they indicate that the following forces were in New Orleans on the dates specified;

1814, Dec. 14: artillery 109; 7th infantry 528; 44th infantry 395; Louisiana volunteers 32; volunteer hussars of Teche 41—total 1105. N. B. Nothing here appears in regard

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to the New Orleans organizations, and blank spaces appear opposite the names “Light Dragoons” and “Mounted Rangers” (f. 66). *Dec. 18*: artillery 109; 7th infantry 636; 44th infantry 399; light dragoons 45; mounted rangers 72; Louisiana volunteers 32; volunteer hussars 41; total 1334 (f. 73). For *Dec. 19* the returns were the same; and for *Dec. 20* they were the same, with the addition of 164 marines—a total of 1496 (ff. 75, 78). *Dec. 23*: artillery III; marines 165; 7th infantry 635; 44th infantry 400; light dragoons 45; Louisiana volunteers 30; mounted rangers 72; Captain Spriggs's Co. 110—total 1568 (f. 85). *Dec. 28*: artillery 170; Colonel Ross's command 1470; General Carroll's division 2521; General Coffee's brigade 750; mounted dragoons 351—total 5262. On the morning of the 23d Coffee and Carroll were in camp four miles north of New Orleans, and that is the reason their commands do not appear in the morning report for that day. In the afternoon and night they were ordered to the scene of fighting below the city.

1815, Jan. 1: artillery and marines 170; Colonel Ross's command 1643; General Carroll's division 2521; General Coffee's brigade 1008; Hind's dragoons (Mississippi) 351; Colonel Young's command—; total (with one blank space) 5693; total for duty 5289 (f. 115). *Jan. 8*: artillery and marines 170; Colonel Ross's command 1654; General Carroll's division 2521; General Coffee's brigade 1036; Hind's dragoons 357; Colonel Young's command 380—total 6118; total for duty 5679 (f. 115a).

A note says: “No report from the Kentucky troops. Supposed to be 550 men for duty with arms and on the line.” Colonel Young's regiment of Louisiana militia, now reported for the first time, was at Madame Parnasse's canal. Colonel Ross's command was made up of certain small organizations, some from the city of New Orleans and some of them small regular army units. On *Jan. 6* its returns were as follows: staff 8; marines 85; 7th infantry 422; 44th infantry 289; Major Plauché's brigade of volunteers 369; Major La Coste's battalion (colored) 226; Major Daquin's battalion of Santo Domingo volunteers 171—total 1570, of whom 1497 were present for duty (f. 110, and vol. VI., ff. 49, 93).

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Details of Louisiana militia were also called to the vicinity of New Orleans, where they encamped on the west bank of the river under Brig.-Gen. David B. Morgan. Jan. 17 he reported a total of 1633, of whom 170 had no arms (vol. VI., f. 6). Besides the assembled militia, the Louisianians were called out en masse to defend their country, and stationed at important points on various water courses. Jan. 18 the report of the Kentucky troops made a total of 2258, of whom 1706 were fit for duty (vol. VI., f. 12). In view of the controversy over the number of Kentucky troops engaged, it is interesting to cite the returns on Jan. 9 of the six companies of the 15th regiment of Kentucky militia under Lieutenant-Colonel Slougher, the other four companies being "across the river". Present for duty were 431, sick 36, detached 9, absent with leave 2, and deserted 2—total 480 (vol. V., f. 119). Jan. 6, 1815, Major Hinds reported his mounted command (from Mississippi) at 351, with 66 sick, and 282 on daily duty. The body consisted of seven companies, under Captains Kemp, Doherty, Richardson, Gerald, Smith, Dearmond, and Adams.

this army arrived in time; in either event, loth as I am to make assurances, beforehand, I would have been willing to undertake for it.

I am sensible, however that we have a thousand times more causes to rejoice than to repine. Heaven, to be sure, has interposed most wonderfully on our behalf, and I am filled with gratitude when I look back to what we have escaped; but I greive the more that we did not, with more wisdom and more industry use the means with which she had blessed us. Again and again I must repeat, we have been always too backward with our preparations. When the enemy comes, we begin to think of driving him away; and scarcely before.

Now that I am upon this subject, permit me to suggest to you the immense value of this section of our country to the union and the great difficulty there will be found in regaining it, if it should once fall into the hands of a powerful enemy. Regular forces on the land, floating batteries on the river, and ships of a proper construction on the Lakes, are, in my opinion, necessary for its defence. So strongly am I impressed with this beleif that I have taken the liberty to order the fire vessel at Chefuncta to be completed; and I do hope

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Government will sanction the measure and enable me to carry it into execution by ordering on 16 long 32 pounders and 16 long 24 pounders, with copper to sheeth her

I beleive a considerable Regular force necessary here, not less to resist foreign invasion than to keep all things quiet and in a proper condition at home. Notwithstanding the great unanimity which appears, very generally to have prevailed among the inhabitants since my arrival, I am fearful that if reverses had overtaken us, or if disaffection could have hoped for favour I should have been compelled to witness a very different scene. I am fearful I should have witnessed it, where it ought least to have been looked for.

I have the happiness to inform you that genl. Gaines has arrived; but I am sorry to add, he is not in very good health.

I have the honor to be very respectfully yr mst obt st